

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SEOUL 03210 190851Z
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00
ICAE-00 INRE-00 OMB-01 IO-13 /064 W
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FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0547
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 3210

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR KS US
SUBJ: PING-PONG DIPLOMACY: U.S. TEAM ACCEPTS INVITATION TO PYONGYANG

1. SUMMARY: APRIL 19 AFTERNOON PRESS IN SEOUL GIVES TOP
FRONT-PAGE COVERAGE TO REPORTED ACCEPTANCE OF AN INVITATION
TO NORTH KOREA BY THE U.S. PING-PONG TEAM. PRESS ALSO COVERS
STATEMENTS BY TABLE TENNIS ASSOCIATION SPOKESMAN AND BY
DEPARTMENT SOURCE. COMMENTARY UNIFORMLY LINKS CURRENT REPORT
WITH 1971 OPENING TO PRC. EMBASSY REQUIRES ALL BACKGROUND
AND GUIDANCE AVAILABLE. END SUMMARY.

2. ALL AFTERNOON PRESS APRIL 19 HEADLINES YOMIURI REPORT
THAT U.S. NATIONAL TABLE TENNIS TEAM HAS ACCEPTED NORTH KOREAN
INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN 35TH WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP TO BE
HELD IN PYONGYANG APRIL 25 TO MAY 6, 1979. IN CHARACTERIZING
ACCEPTANCE MOST PAPERS PLAY IT IN MANNER WHICH IMPLIES U.S.
GOVERNMENT SUPPORT.

3. GEORGE KENNEDY, DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, U.S.
TABLE TENNIS ASSOCIATION, EXTENSIVELY QUOTED ON ASPECTS
OF TRIP. HE REPORTEDLY COMPARED IT TO 1971 PRC INITIATIVE
AND EXPRESSED HOPE THAT SIMILAR HIGH-LEVEL MEETINGS WOULD
BE POSSIBLE IN PYONGYANG. DEPARTMENT OF STATE SOURCE IS
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QUOTED AS SAYING USG WAS AWARE OF CORRESPONDENCE, HAD
REPEALED TRAVEL BANS TO NORTH KOREA, AND THEREFORE COULD
NOT HELP BUT GRANT PERMISSION FOR A VISIT BY U.S. TEAM.
SOURCE ALSO QUOTED AS SAYING TRIP IS NOTHING MORE THAN
A VISIT BY A SMALL GROUP AND HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH
POLITICAL ISSUES.

4. MOFA SPOKESMAN STATES IT HAS RECEIVED NO INFORMATION ON PROPOSED TRIP AND HAS REQUESTED ROK EMBASSY WASHINGTON TO QUERY DEPARTMENT. SPOKESMAN CONTINUED THAT IF TRIP REPORT TRUE, IT COULD CAUSE SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES SINCE PRC AND USSR HAVE DECLINED PARTICIPATION IN WORLD SHOOTING COMPETITION SCHEDULED FOR SEOUL AND PYONGYANG HAS REBUFFED SOUTH KOREAN EFFORTS TO PARTICIPATE IN WORLD TABLE TENNIS MEET. SPOKESMAN ALSO SAID THAT TRIP BY U.S. TEAM TO PYONGYANG COULD NOT BE WELCOMED BY THE KOREAN GOVERNMENT.

5. PAPERS ALSO CARRY COMMENTARY ON POSSIBLE MEANINGS OF SUCH A TRIP. COMMENTARY NOTES RECENT TRIPARTITE TALK DISCUSSIONS IN CONNECTION WITH TITO AND CEAUSESCU TRIPS AND ATMOSPHERE OF SEEKING DIRECT CONTACT WITH NORTH KOREA. THEY FURTHER MAKE THE OBVIOUS LINKAGE TO THE 1971 TEAM VISIT TO THE PRC AND THE RESULTS THAT FLOWED FROM THIS. COMMENTARY ALSO NOTES THAT AS ROK IS EXCLUDED BY THE NORTH FROM TABLE TENNIS COMPETITION, IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT PARTICIPATION BY U.S. TEAM WILL BE USED BY NORTH KOREA TO STIMULATE DIRECT DIALOGUE.

6. COMMENT: EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED NO INFORMATION ON ANY SUCH VISIT. WHILE WE REALIZE ALL LOCAL STORIES ARE RESULT OF SINGLE YOMIURI ARTICLE, WOULD APPRECIATE ANY BACKGROUND AND GUIDANCE DEPARTMENT CAN PROVIDE ASAP. IF REPORT TRUE, GIVEN CURRENT ATMOSPHERE, WE EXPECT A CONFIDENTIAL

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RELATIVELY SEVERE REACTION FROM THE ROKG.
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Message Attributes

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Control Number: n/a
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Draft Date: 19 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
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Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
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Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
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